

As we discussed in chapters 4 and 5, the humanitarian response was not as swift as it might have been, held hostage at various points by political calculations. But it did ultimately prove generous. In the decade following the floods of 1995, the international community provided North Korea with over \$1.5 billion in food aid alone.

Yet as we also have shown, the North Korean government consistently sought to frustrate transparent, effective humanitarian relief. It is likely that aid is not proffered in a nondiscriminatory manner. Diversion is almost certainly occurring on a large scale, enough food to feed between 3 to 10 percent or more of the North Korean populace. Some of this aid is almost surely consumed by politically connected groups, including the military.<sup>20</sup> The diversion that goes to the market has some positive effects but is also contributing to the creation of a privileged class of state-sector entrepreneurs and their allies and an increasingly stratified society, with a sharp division between those with access to foreign exchange and food and those without.

A crucial first question is whether the international community—viewed as a whole—should provide aid to North Korea at all. A variety of critics—not only in the United States but in Europe and South Korea as well—have argued that aid to North Korea serves to prolong the life of the existing regime (North Korea Advisory Group 1999; Terry 2001; and C. Kang 2005). Some have drawn the conclusion that the goals of policy reform or even regime change would be

advanced by coordinated action to cut North Korea off from the international economy and even from external supplies of food (C. Kang 2005).

We agree wholeheartedly that a reformist government or, better still, a peaceful change of regime would be highly desirable. We have also suggested that a coordinated strategy of cutting North Korea off from international assistance would increase the probability of regime change. But there are a number of problems in jumping from the benefits of regime change to a policy of reducing humanitarian assistance. The North Korean government has shown repeatedly its willingness to impose extreme deprivation on its people. The probability that coordinated, wholesale reductions in food aid will lead to improved conditions, policy reform, or regime change remains both uncertain and well below 100 percent.

Moreover, there is little evidence that the coordination required to have the intended (if uncertain) effect is possible given the competing political interests of the donor countries. To the contrary, reductions in multilateral assistance have been matched by increases in bilateral aid from South Korea and China. Thus reductions in aid from any one party must be weighed both against the unlikelihood that such reductions will have their intended effect and the loss of leverage that comes from disengagement.

It is also important to emphasize that the violation of humanitarian norms, the flaws in the aid program, and the problem of diversion do not mean that aid is without positive effects. Aid has had beneficial effects both directly, by increasing overall supply and moderating prices, and indirectly, by encouraging commercialization and the growth of markets.<sup>21</sup> The highest estimates of diversion that we have seen—fully 50 percent going to less-deserving groups or the military—still leave 50 percent of food going to meet the needs of vulnerable groups. Markets have clearly been developing and are likely to continue to do so despite the retrenchment of late 2005.

Most important, the argument for cutting food aid rests on a highly dubious utilitarian logic: that it is morally acceptable to sacrifice the innocent today in the uncertain probability that lives will be saved or improved at some future point. This type of argument flies directly in the face of the fundamental rights that the international community is trying to uphold. We applaud those with the courage to make such a sacrifice for themselves. But we are much less comfortable with the notion that the outside community should make that decision for vulnerable North Korean citizens. It is important to point out that those NGOs who did pull out of North Korea did so in the context of continued aid through the World Food Programme, bilateral donors, and other NGOs. The calculus is very different when considering whether total food aid should be reduced or cut altogether.

If the arguments in favor of continued assistance seem clear, we must simultaneously be clear-headed about the nature of the bargains that have been struck and continually seek to advance the underlying purposes of humanitarian assistance. The donor community must be a voice of conscience for those deprived of the most fundamental right to food. The WFP and its associated donors must:

- continue to highlight government practices that impede the delivery of food to vulnerable groups, including diversion;
- continue to uphold humanitarian principles, including the empowerment of beneficiaries; and
- continue to press for effective assessment that would provide information not only to outsiders but to the North Korean government itself on the nature of the health and nutritional problems faced by its citizens.

Failure to uphold the basic norms of humanitarian assistance risks turning North Korean exceptionalism into the North Korean precedent in dealing with complex humanitarian emergencies.

Although we oppose cutting off food aid, we agree with the critics that the international community must make a concerted and coordinated effort to wean North Korea off humanitarian assistance. This would involve outlining and negotiating a path of reduced aid—subject to reversal in the face of natural disasters—that would point toward self-sufficiency, defined as the capacity to import adequate external supplies on commercial terms. One of our most disturbing findings is the evidence that North Korea seems unwilling to spend scarce foreign exchange on food. We cannot allow this practice to continue and must voice our intent to shift the burden of financing North Korea's food deficit from the international humanitarian community—which is facing pressing needs elsewhere—onto the North Koreans themselves.

A component of this strategy of reducing humanitarian assistance is to couple